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Post-Political Development and Emancipation : Urban Participatory Projects in Helsinki

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The literature on governance and collaborative planning promotes citizen participation in policy-making and planning while its critics emphasize the post-political character of these processes. This study addresses these themes by analyzing two participatory projects in the Helsinki Metropolitan Area. Our claim is that the post-political framework downplays neighbourhood activism and overlooks differences in local participatory projects not based on protest. These projects include partnerships, expert NGOs and participatory models, often labelled as post-political. However, they can also challenge the dichotomy between top-down and bottom-up development, provide new opportunities for grassroots-level actors and combine horizontal and vertical forms of engagement.

Post-Political Development and Emancipation

Urban Participatory Projects in Helsinki

Kanerva Kuokkanen and Emilia Palonen

Introduction

There has been a growing interest in public administration and research to create participatory procedures and partnerships in policy-making and planning. The political science literature on governance emphasizes the role of multi-actor networks and the development of participatory and deliberative procedures related to them ([Papadopoulos and Warin 2007](#)), while the collaborative planning approach has underlined citizen involvement and consensus in the planning process ([Healey 2006](#)).

Literature on the post-political character of these processes has risen as a counter-reaction to the more optimistic views (e.g. [Wilson and Swyngedouw 2014a](#); [Paddison 2009](#)). It criticizes consensual forms of participation, seeing them as expert-drawn and giving little space for dissent, political change and the politicization of issues beyond a narrowly predefined framework, while highlighting the potential of insurgent grassroots-level activism as a source of emancipation and change ([Wilson and Swyngedouw 2014a](#); cf. [Griggs et al. 2014](#)).

Many participatory and deliberative initiatives are based on fixed-term projects funded by public authorities and implemented by various actors, including NGOs and residents. These projects are based on the simultaneous development of new forms of action and mobilizing

citizens and NGOs. They can nevertheless strengthen actors who already possess resources or, alternatively, lead to symbolic and post-political forms of participation (Pinson 2009).

This study addresses these themes through the analysis of two projects in the Helsinki Metropolitan Area. The first one, Citizen Channel, developed a ‘toolbox’ of participation for the neighbouring municipalities of Helsinki, Espoo, Vantaa and Kauniainen in 2005–2007. The second project is the participatory planning process and the development of a governance model for the Maunula House, a multifunctional municipal building where the Maunula Democracy Project took part in the framework of Democracy Pilots in Helsinki in 2013–2016. The analysis of Citizen Channel is based on qualitative interviews with municipal officials, project administration and the participating residents, while the Maunula case draws on action research, where a researcher actively participates in the process, combining hands-on work in the Maunula Democracy Project and insights from radical democratic theory.

Our claim is that the post-political framework, although describing current participatory governance arrangements rather accurately, downplays neighbourhood activism and does not take into account differences in local participatory projects not based on protest. The research questions connecting both case studies are the following: Can short-term projects affect long-term development? How can traditional decision-making hierarchies, particularly top-down or bottom-up between officials and grassroots organizing, be contested in these projects? Is there a broader shift in the roles and responsibilities of municipal officials and grassroots-level actors? What are the implications for the literatures on post-political development and emancipation? First, we will look at the existing literature on governance, planning, projects and participation, and the counter-reaction of the literature on the post-political development to them. Second, we will present the Finnish context and two case studies from the Helsinki Region, Citizen Channel

and Maunula Democracy Project, respectively. Finally, we will relate our findings to research on post-political participation and emancipation.

Governance, Planning, Projects and Participation— and the Post-Political Turn

Since the 1990s, both political science and planning literatures have been concerned with multi-actor and participatory forms of policy-making and planning. In political science, governance (often used with a prefix such as ‘collaborative’ or ‘participatory’) refers to networks and partnerships between public authorities, market actors and civil society. In contrast to earlier New Public Management based on marketization, it also emphasizes the role of NGOs and citizens and the development of participatory and deliberative processes (Papadopoulos and Warin 2007; Sørensen 2005). In planning literature, there is an interrelated body of research on collaborative planning (e.g. Healey 2006), based on the Habermasian idea of communicative rationality emphasizing dialogue, consensus and citizen involvement.

Several scholars have pointed to existing deficits in governance arrangements, underlining their weak links to representative institutions and their tendency to favour better-off groups (Papadopoulos and Warin 2007; Sørensen 2005). Communicative rationality and deliberation have been challenged by scholars who see that issues of power also exist behind consensual decisions and emphasize the necessity of dissent in political action (Flyvbjerg 1998; Mouffe 1993; Hillier 2003).

The literature on post-political development, in particular, criticizes governance and participatory and deliberative arrangements where the framework is set by public authorities and

there is little room for citizen influence and the politicization of issues beyond a predefined framework (Paddison 2009; Wilson and Swyngedouw 2014a). This literature draws on the writings of Chantal Mouffe, Jacques Rancière and Slavoj Žižek, among others. Here, the concept of post-political refers to the substitution of contestation and agonistic engagement by consensual and technocratic procedures that do not question the political and economic status quo (Wilson and Swyngedouw 2014b: 6). Wilson and Swyngedouw state, “political contradictions are reduced to policy problems to be managed by experts and legitimated through participatory processes in which the scope of possible outcomes is narrowly defined in advance” (*Ibid.*: 6). The post-political framework, in its turn, has been criticized of not taking into account differences and the potential present in some of these participatory processes, seeing the only form of emancipation in protest movements (Larner 2014). Simultaneously, there is a literature that aims to combine the perspectives of consensus and conflict in planning theory (Lebuhn 2017; cf. Purcell 2009). We would like to challenge these dichotomies in the current literature through our case studies.

In practice, governance and participatory arrangements are often project-based (Jensen et al. 2007; Pinson 2009). Projects in cities cover not only building, but the development of administrative and participatory models and the empowerment of residents in ‘worse-off’ neighbourhoods (Pinson 2009). In the managerial project literature, a ‘project’ is defined as unique and temporarily limited (Packendorff 1995). However, individual projects coexist, follow and replace one another and together form a long-term social and organizational structure (Boltanski and Chiapello 1999: 158). Pinson (2009) sees that this ‘metaproject’ includes horizons, principles and policy discourses forming a framework for individual projects.

In line with the governance logic, projects include networks, partnerships, stakeholder involvement, the combination of expert and lay knowledge, and ideas of ‘active citizenship’ (Pinson 2009; Jensen et al. 2007; Boltanski and Chiapello 1999). Actors implementing publicly financed urban projects include NGOs, research and cultural institutes, consultants and development companies, among others (Nonjon 2012; Pinson 2009). There is a professionalization of paid project staff (Kováč and Kučerová 2006), and the development of participation has become a specific field of expertise (Nonjon 2012). In his analysis of European urban projects, Pinson (2009) sees that although these projects have participatory and deliberative elements, they tend to be elitist and exclude the working class, marginalized groups, the critics of current urban policy and municipal representative institutions—in conformity with the post-political thesis. However, in parallel with publicly funded projects, grassroots-level citizen movements have also adopted a project-style form of action: short-term, issue-based activity rather than long-term association-based work. In their study of Dutch neighbourhood activists, van de Wijdeven and Hendriks (2009) draw the picture of neighbourhood ‘project conductors’, not involved in formal politics nor established governance networks but interested in concrete neighbourhood issues.

The Context of the Study: Finland and Helsinki

Finland is characterized by a unitary state, broad municipal responsibilities and a weak regional level undergoing ongoing political reforms. The Finnish political system has been labelled as ‘consensual’, referring to collaboration between associations and officials, a low level of social conflicts and a proportional system of representation (Sjöblom 2011: 243–245). However, a

severe economic depression in the 1990s, followed by high levels of unemployment, uneven economic development and New Public Management–oriented political reforms, led to a decline in electoral turnout and confidence in politics (cf. [Borg 2013](#)). Since then, public authorities have shown interest in the development of both electoral democracy and direct citizen participation, related to political reforms at the local level. These issues are also present in the Helsinki Region, consisting of the Finnish capital and its neighbouring municipalities.

In Helsinki, neighbourhood-level participation has primarily occurred through self-organized neighbourhood associations representing residents: they are invited to comment on municipal issues, particularly urban planning. The umbrella organization, Helsinki Neighborhoods Association Helka, consists of the 78 district associations. Crucially, Helka is an NGO that has acquired a status of a semi-official intermediary organization between the city (top) and the citizens (grassroots) and an expert organization in questions of resident participation. Its projects gain funding from diverse public sources. Recently, there has been a proliferation of network-based local activism in Helsinki not tied to existing neighbourhood associations or publicly financed projects, characterized by a do-it-yourself spirit and new forms of community-oriented thinking ([Hernberg 2012](#); [Tulikukka 2012](#)). These may also use resources offered by the municipality (see [Table 7.1](#) for our two cases contextualized in Helsinki).

Table 7.1 Central organizations and actors in participation in Helsinki
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Helsinki

- Municipal institutions: city council and board, mayor, committees and boards, departments
- Fixed-term development programs conducted by the municipality, often including other organizations (e.g. Uusimaa region, neighbouring municipalities) [Urban Program for the Helsinki Metropolitan Area; Welfare City program]
- Projects funded by these programs, involving municipal administration, local NGOs, residents, companies, etc. [Citizen Channel; KEVEIN]
- Projects and consultations (initiated by the city council) organized by the municipality [Maunula Democracy Project]
- Helsinki Neighborhoods Association Helka: umbrella organization of neighbourhood associations, conducts projects and has contacts to municipal administration, neighbourhoods and residents, institutionalized consultant role [Citizen Channel; KEVEIN]
- Neighbourhood associations: members of Helka in each district
- Residents: use various forms of influence and participation (local associations, projects, loose resident groups, activism, municipal elections, feedback to municipal administration etc.) [Maunula Democracy Project's background]

Source: Kanerva Kuokkanen and Emilia Palonen, 2017

Citizen Channel: NGO-Led Development of Participatory Tools

One of the first participatory projects planned and conducted by Helsinki Neighborhoods Association Helka—together with street-level municipal officials and local NGOs represented in the project administration—was the Citizen Channel project, implemented in 2005–2007. It was funded by the Urban Program for the Helsinki Metropolitan Area, a metropolitan development program steered by the municipality of Helsinki, three neighbouring municipalities, the state and inter-municipal organizations. The initial purpose of the project—to develop a common model of interaction between the citizens and the administration for the four central municipalities of

Helsinki Metropolitan Area—was soon redefined as a more general development of a ‘toolbox’ of participatory tools. The pilot areas of the project were neighbourhoods that crossed administrative municipal borders. Tools tested in these areas included neighbourhood-level discussion forums; meetings between residents and municipal officials; internet sites and forums; networks of core neighbourhood actors; workshops with schoolchildren; neighbourhood SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) and participatory GIS (geographical information systems). A distinct part of the project developed guidelines for client feedback in municipal services. The final ‘toolbox’ published by the Citizen Channel project included a description of these central tools.

In interviews among the actors of the Urban Program and Citizen Channel, Helka was presented as a professional organization in project management, municipal collaboration and neighbourhood participation. Parallels can be drawn to the French literature on ‘professionals in participation’ in urban policies (Nonjon 2012), combining academic knowledge and ‘hands-on’ experience from neighbourhoods. Still, the Citizen Channel project administration talked about the development of participation as a ‘dream’ and ‘passion’, seeing themselves as ‘peers’ in neighbourhood projects and representing an alternative working logic to municipal administration, thus combining a professional and a more idealistic role (cf. Tranvik and Selle 2008). During the project, Helka had collaboration both with the administration of the four municipalities involved and with neighbourhood associations and their activists.

While some activities organized by Citizen Channel involved a greater number of residents in the pilot areas, the central participants of the project were activists of neighbourhood associations who had a long history in their neighbourhoods. The official aim of Citizen Channel was to create a model or, later, a toolbox of participation, whereas the participating residents

emphasized actual local issues. It was a deliberate choice by project administration to let the residents concentrate on these issues, while the project staff was working on the toolbox of participation using the experiences from the resident events as material. There was some discussion on the topic among project administrators. However, most of them did not question this approach, as they believed that the development of participatory tools would not interest the residents. They hoped that the toolbox of participation would be used in a later phase in municipalities—either in a metropolitan setting or in other contexts—and would give new opportunities for resident involvement.

After project funding ended, the project administration wished that residents could continue to work with the local issues identified during the project. As the initiative for the project came from project administration and not from the residents themselves, the latter had difficulties continuing activities without the project staff organizing them. For the participating residents, the project did not lead to new forms of emancipation or empowerment: they were already active in their neighbourhood before the project; the main benefits they derived from Citizen Channel were the creation of new contacts and networks.

Despite the hopes of the project administration, the municipalities involved did not use the Citizen Channel toolbox after the initial project ended. This caused some discussion among project administrators about the outsourcing of issues from municipal administration to NGOs. From a critical perspective, this meant legitimizing rather than transforming existing policies, as project results were not used in the municipal administration. From a more pragmatic point of view, delegating duties in the field of participation was logical because of Helka's and other NGOs' contacts at the grassroots level and their knowledge of everyday life in the neighbourhoods. After Citizen Channel, Helka and other members of the project administration

got involved in new projects on resident participation. Some of the interviewees saw this as a form of creating continuity in the project world (cf. [Pinson 2009](#)) and strengthened citizen involvement both inside and outside municipal administration in the long term.

During the ten years since Citizen Channel, Helka has further strengthened its role as a general reference point for local groups and a larger field of participatory projects. Participation has also been taken more seriously by the municipality with a simultaneous rise in resident activism ([Tulikukka 2012](#); [Hernberg 2012](#)). Our next case, the Maunula Democracy Project, shows how another participatory project is born without intermediary organizations—although during the course of the project, the project itself requires the status of an intermediary organization and finally, Helka also gets involved.

The Maunula Democracy Project: Active Residents and Interrelated Projects

The Maunula Democracy Project (MDP) started in 2012 as a response to the call for applications for Democracy Pilots by the mayor of Helsinki, aimed to develop new forms of participation and democracy in neighbourhoods or in specific fields like youth work ([Stöblom 2014](#)). Maunula had a long tradition of active local development: various projects have been implemented in the area during the last decades, including those run by Helka. Collaborative culture had been strong in the neighbourhood in the 1980s and 1990s, with street-level bureaucrats collaborating with residents. They fought for a cultural centre since 1986, but the plans made through cooperation with the city did not get financing in the recession of the 1990s, nor in the early 2000s ([Staffans](#)

2004). The neighbourhood is currently a socioeconomically mixed area with under-funded cultural facilities, despite an engaged population of primarily middle-class and pensioners.

With the call for Democracy Pilots, demands from earlier decades to build a cultural centre became interrelated with the development of local democracy and participation, central to the Democracy Pilot framework. In 2012, active locals, local councillors and local civil society organizations, including the neighbourhood association Maunula-seura (member of Helka), organized a meeting inviting local associations and interested individuals. Their proposal was accepted as one of eleven Democracy Pilots. It included a demand for democracy spaces—first, the opening of local community centre’s street-level offices to citizen-led activity (which will be not dealt with in this analysis) and, second, the participatory planning of the multifunctional building Maunula House—as well as participatory budgeting (which was adopted as a tool for the Maunula House’s eventual program planning). It soon became clear that achieving either of the goals could not be done within the year assigned for the pilots; hence, that project would not have a fixed time frame.

In the first widely announced meeting in 2013, with over 70 participants, the locals decided to “get under the bureaucrats’ skin” (Palonen 2017) in the planning of the Maunula House and chose their spokespersons for this. The city reopened the plan for this multifunctional building housing three municipal functions: a library, a youth centre and a civic adult education unit. The MDP’s first task was to involve residents throughout the planning process of Maunula House in equal terms with the three municipal departments instead of a traditional planning process which is divided into separate planning and citizen consultation phases. Rather than applying an existing deliberative framework or participatory toolbox (such as the one from Citizen Channel), the MDP started to work on its own approach to participatory planning and co-

governance. This was not the case with all Democracy Pilots; in another Helsinki neighbourhood, the municipality forced the pilot to test the citizen jury model, meaning that the many ideas from the public were not discussed and people felt excluded, confirming the problems of post-politics (see [Sjöblom 2014](#)).

In Maunula, the citizen spokesperson(s) attended most meetings of the officials alongside the three departments. They insisted that the architects of the Maunula House and landscape architects would first meet with the locals and then test their plans twice with them. Local meetings and larger citizen-led workshops constituted the framework. The open calls sought to engage new groups, schools, renters' associations and immigrants, widening the scope so that meetings always had some regulars and some newcomers. The meetings were led by locals, with officials from municipal departments often present. Rather than seeking consensus, different voices and ideas were gathered, tried out in the plan and articulated into demands for planners. Partnership discourse was a tactic tool to maintain strong discussion among citizen groups and municipal officials.

Little funding was earmarked for the pilots, and when the Democracy Pilot officially ended, the activists of the MDP continued their project by themselves. The MDP refused to be a mere fixed-term project, as it drew on the tradition of neighbourhood activism in Maunula and aimed to establish more enduring results than the assigned one-year-long pilot allowed for, including resident involvement in the planning process and a model of local co-governance for the Maunula House based on resident representation, participatory budgeting and inter-departmental cooperation. Many of the principles came from the planning phase, such as large meetings for voicing and articulating demands and selecting resident representatives to a council and steering group.

While some of the MDP actives started the project with demands for inclusion, this potential conflict was tamed by a positive response from municipal officials. The inclusion of locals lessened conflict between the three municipal departments involved. The process was largely based on consent, although the citizen perspective was sometimes in contradiction with the officials' view. An easily accessible meeting space and a café that could also be run by local groups was the most important demand that the spokespersons hung on to during the first meetings. The second part of the project addressed local democracy in the governance of the House. Conflicts emerged later when the feasibility of these central demands were questioned.

Crucially, the character and model of the MDP developed through conflict. When municipal officials working with issues of participation got involved, they assumed that an existing model of participatory budgeting could be directly adopted in Maunula instead of being adapted through the local co-governance model in development. Their view on participation emphasizing general and transferable participatory tools differed from that of the MPD, which had taken the position of intermediary organization representing the residents. Most importantly, in the MDP, the notion of representation was not tied to representing predefined groups but on articulating demands (cf. [Laclau 1996](#); [Disch 2011](#)). These demands were based on the meetings held with the residents, so they could not be overlooked as just another suggestion from the abstract masses.

The MDP had functioned without external funding since the ending of the Democracy Pilots at the end of 2014. However, in summer 2016, they decided to take part in a four-month KEVEIN project (a Finnish acronym for 'From Developer Networks to Innovation Platform') run by Helka and funded by the municipality of Helsinki and the surrounding Uusimaa region through a specific Welfare City program. The KEVEIN framework appeared to be an attractive

way to register the achievements of their initial project for the central MDP actors. After deciding the KEVEIN project would continue the activities of the MDP in practice, they opted to treat it as a supporting side-project while continuing with their own project. The MDP actors hoped that the KEVEIN project would foster citizen-led ethos in other contexts, with the risk that Helka's semi-official role in participation could alienate some active locals not accustomed to Helka's way of working. KEVEIN funding ensured utilizing the newest Maunula Model, but at the same time Maunula was subsumed into KEVEIN's discourse, which emphasized local innovations and innovativeness.

The co-governance model for the Maunula House was revealed and adopted in a meeting in August 2016. This meeting confirmed that during the process even the participating officials' perspectives on local democracy and representation changed. In September 2016, the Maunula Model was presented at an official process on developing participation in Helsinki. In contrast to other models discussed in that event, it was the only concrete proposal stressing the combination of horizontal local engagement with vertical representational processes. The impact of the project, the models of citizen-centred participatory planning and the co-governance model of Maunula House—or the functioning House itself—remains to be seen, but participants on both sides felt it sought to challenge the limits it had been assigned from the above (cf. [Wilson and Swyngedouw 2014a](#)). In the opening ceremony of the Maunula House on 4 February 2017, the vice-mayor stated that the participatory model developed in Maunula is one of the most important pilots as the city reforms its participation framework in 2017.

Participatory Projects—Post-Political or Emancipatory?

To summarize, our cases show two distinct ways to organize participatory projects (see [Table 7.1](#)). In Citizen Channel, the emphasis was on participatory tools. While the intention was for Helka to coordinate between municipal administration and neighbourhood associations, the role of the project staff became over-pronounced while the residents' role remained limited. This was caused by the decision of the project administration to separate the roles of residents addressing concrete issues from the development of a more abstract participatory toolbox by the project administration. The results of the project were undermined by the fact that the toolbox of participation was not adopted by the municipalities involved. Some interviewees saw the project as a way to legitimize rather than change current policies. However, the more optimistic interviewees saw the project as part of a trajectory that could change administrative and societal culture towards a more participatory one in the long term.

The Maunula Democracy Project, carried out almost a decade later, managed to avoid the pitfalls of Citizen Channel because the initiative came from the residents, there was a clear connection between the developed models and the building of the Maunula House, and municipal officials were open to the residents' propositions. The MDP operated as an open platform but had representatives collaborating with municipal officials simultaneously. During the process, it became an intermediary organization between the residents and the municipality. Considered as the citizens' representative, the MDP invited locals to provide ideas, develop them into demands in open meetings and amplify them through chosen spokespersons alongside the officials. Although the MDP was based on partnership logic, the intention was to gather voices and ideas rather than reach a consensus. The conflicts that emerged were seen as demanding but also useful for the process generally as they widened the bureaucrats' and citizens' perspectives. The MDP created two models, one on participatory planning and the other one on the co-

governance of the Maunula House. Participation in the Helka-run innovation platform project was seen as a possible way to enable articulation and exportation of that model and make it more durable than the pilot year or the four years of the MDP. **Table 7.2** summarizes the key features of our two cases.

Table 7.2 The central elements of Citizen Channel and Maunula Democracy Project

Project	Citizen Channel	Maunula Democracy Project
Central actor	Helsinki Neighborhoods Association Helka (umbrella organization for neighbourhood associations in Helsinki)	Maunula residents and associations call for open meeting to form the spokespeople for MDP, an open platform
Involved actors	Helsinki and three neighbouring municipalities (upper- and street-level bureaucrats); local NGOs represented in the project administration; neighbourhood association activists (and other residents)	Helsinki and its departments involved in Maunula House (key functions: library, youth centre, civic adult education); municipal officials with participation duties (2014–); Helka (through KEVEIN project 2016–); residents, local groups, neighbourhood association
Funding	Project funding through Urban Program for the Helsinki Metropolitan Area	Minor financing through Mayor's Democracy Pilots and the Helka-run KEVEIN project (financed by the Welfare City program of Helsinki and the Uusimaa Region)
Idea of participation	Division between local issues (task of the residents) and participatory tools (task of project administration)	Open platform and spokespersons collaborate with officials; articulating demands together, not

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		representing pre-given groups
Consensus and conflict	Consensus rather than conflict; some discussion about the priorities of the project; project administration disappointed by the fact that municipalities did not use the toolbox	Consensus on working together for a new model; ability to voice multiple, contrasting demands and disagreements on common platforms locally or at officials' meetings; central contents of the project emerged through conflict
Results	A 'toolbox' of participation	The citizen-led participatory planning process and a model of co-governance for Maunula House
Long-term effect	The toolbox developed in the project not used by the municipalities; themes continue in later projects by Helka and other actors	The co-governance model in use in Maunula House; MDP inspires participation and local democracy development in Helsinki; potential long-term results

Source: Kanerva Kuokkanen and Emilia Palonen, 2017

In this research, we asked first whether short-term projects could affect long-term development. Our answer is yes, they can, but not automatically: Despite the problems of Citizen Channel and the fact that the toolbox was not widely adopted, Helka's projects created frameworks for a new ethos of participation in the City of Helsinki. Because of the momentum and enthusiasm at different levels of Helsinki, MDP's initiative was successful and set a model for the whole city. Second, we inquired how the dichotomies between top-down and bottom-up and between officials and grassroots could be contested in these projects, and whether they implied a broader shift in the roles and responsibilities of municipal officials and grassroots-level actors. The two cases show differing processes between municipal officials, city-level NGOs like

Helka and organized neighbourhood actors as citizen representatives or spokespeople. Projects, often following one another, enable the interaction between them.

Furthermore, we asked about the implications for the literature on post-political development and emancipation. The cases are not examples of protests or radical social movements presented as alternatives to post-political development (Wilson and Swyngedouw 2014a), but include elements that are often presented as post-political: partnerships, NGOs specializing in participation, participatory models and incremental neighbourhood-level transformation. Tasks from municipalities are outsourced to NGOs and resident actors, using them as developers of pilots and models that may later be used by the municipal administration, but may also establish more permanent co-governance structures.

NGOs and residents equally grab onto opportunities provided by municipalities and publicly funded projects. While in Citizen Channel, the role of participatory models and the influence of NGO-led professional project administration were over-pronounced when compared to the residents' role; during the last decade Helka acted as an enabling structure in resident-led projects rather than the central actor. More grass-rooted actors may emerge, organize and engage with the city over time as the MDP shows. Here, we share the criticism of Larner (2014) about the literature on post-politics ignoring differences and context in neighbourhood projects and in emerging forms of local activism.

Our case studies question the usual perspectives of the post-political in two ways. First, they challenge the dichotomy between top-down and bottom-up by showing the role of Helka and the MDP as intermediary organizations in participatory projects. Second, the case of MDP showed that participation might include different levels of engagement: citizens both generate horizontal ties and engage in vertical representational processes when generating positions and

voicing demands. This contrasts with [Deleuze and Guattari \(1983\)](#)–inspired contributions emphasizing horizontality. Even [Purcell's \(2009: 159\)](#) discussion of Laclau and Mouffe does not stress the crucially joined role of verticality (articulating demands) and horizontality ('chains of equivalence' between groups) in their theory. For example, when the future of participatory models were discussed in September 2016 in an open workshop organized by the City of Helsinki, the Maunula Model was the only concrete proposal stressing horizontality, local engagement and debate, seeing the participating residents as an open-ended and diverse group with multiple conflicting views to be articulated into demands rather than a demographically defined representative body. Still, the status of the project as a positive example of cooperation between locals and city officials across participating departments may have a profound impact on participation in Helsinki.

The articulation of demands is a crucial part of politics from the post-political perspective of Ernesto [Laclau \(2005, 1996\)](#): It requires maintaining both horizontal ties and generating empty and floating signifiers (e.g. projects, demands, spokespersons) that can be referred to and may represent various and heterogeneous demands. In this process, ideas are transformed into demands. For [Laclau and Mouffe \(1985\)](#), politics is not only about conflict and political frontiers but also about the way in which heterogeneous demands can be articulated into a common struggle or cause ([Gilbert 2014](#)). It is particularly important in this process that 'empty signifiers' work as sufficient representatives able to traverse widely across diverse, incomplete and contingent groups and demands ([Laclau 1996](#)). This demand-gathering activity, articulation process and long-term effects of projects in developing new participatory frameworks are understudied. Yet, they seem to open new possibilities for resident involvement and co-

governance instead of juxtaposing consensual and conflictual forms of participation typical of post-politics.

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1 The empirical data relating to Citizen Channel has been collected, analyzed and interpreted in a previous scientific publication ([Kuokkanen 2016](#)). The Maunula House case has been researched by the second author of this article, political theorist Emilia Palonen, as participant action researcher.